

IN THE CLAIMS

Claims 1 - 18 and 33 - 76 (Withdrawn)

Claims 19 - 32 (Canceled)

Claims 77 - 90 (Allowed)

91. (Currently amended) A diagnostic system, in kit form, comprising, in an amount sufficient to perform ~~at least one an~~ assay, the composition of [an]a recombinant HCV capsid antigen according to Claim 32 ~~wherein said composition is essentially free of procaryotic antigens and other HCV-related proteins.~~

92. (Currently amended) A method of assaying a body fluid sample for the presence of antibodies against an HCV capsid antigen which comprises:

- a) forming an immunoreaction admixture by admixing said body fluid sample with a composition of Claim 32;
- b) maintaining said immunoreaction admixture for a time period sufficient for any of said antibodies present to immunoreact with said HCV capsid antigen to form an immunoreaction product; and
- c) detecting the presence of any of said immunoreaction product formed and thereby the presence of said antibodies.

93. (Currently amended) The method of Claim 36, wherein said specific binding agent is Protein A or at least one of the antibodies anti-human IgG and anti-human IgM.

94. (Currently amended) The method of Claim [36]92, wherein said label is lanthanide chelate, biotin, an enzyme, a radioactive isotope or a fluorescent moiety.

95. (Previously withdrawn) A recombinant expression vector comprising a first nucleic acid having the sequence AGGAGGGTTTTCAT operatively linked to a second nucleic acid consisting of a nucleotide sequence which encodes an HCV nonstructural 794 antigen having the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:16 or the corresponding sequence from a different HCV strain.

96. (Currently amended) The vector of Claim [39]95, wherein said expression vector is pGEX7 comprising said first nucleic and second nucleic acids.

97. (Currently amended) The vector of Claim [40]96, wherein said vector is pGEX-NS3-794.

98. (Currently amended) A prokaryotic host cell comprising an expression vector of Claim [39]95.

99. (Currently amended) A method of producing an HCV nonstructural 794 antigen which comprises

- (a) treating a host cell comprising an expression vector of Claim [39]95 under conditions and for a time effective to express said antigen; and
- (b) recovering said antigen.

100. (Currently amended) A recombinant HCV nonstructural 794 antigen produced by the method of Claim [43]99.

101. (Currently amended) A composition comprising a recombinant HCV nonstructural 794 antigen of Claim [44]100, wherein said composition is essentially free of prokaryotic antigens and other HCV-related proteins.

102. (Currently amended) A diagnostic system, in kit form, comprising, in an amount sufficient to perform an assay, the composition of an HCV nonstructural 794 antigen according to Claim [45]101.

103. (Currently amended) A method of assaying a body fluid sample for the presence of antibodies against an HCV nonstructural 794 antigen which comprises:

- a) forming an immunoreaction admixture by admixing said body fluid sample with a composition of Claim [45]101;
- b) maintaining said immunoreaction admixture for a time period sufficient for any of said antibodies present to immunoreact with said HCV nonstructural 794 antigen to form an immunoreaction product; and
- c) detecting the presence of any of said immunoreaction product formed and thereby the presence of said antibodies.

104. (Currently amended) The method of Claim [49]103, wherein said specific binding agent is Protein A or at least one of the antibodies anti-human IgG and anti-human IgM.

105. (Currently amended) The method of Claim [49]103, wherein said label is lanthanide chelate, biotin, an enzyme, a radioactive isotope or a fluorescent moiety.

106. (Currently amended) A composition comprising a recombinant HCV capsid antigen consisting of amino acids 1-120 and a recombinant HCV nonstructural 794 antigen consisting of amino acids of SEQ ID NO:16, or the corresponding sequence from another HCV strain, wherein said composition is essentially free of prokaryotic antigens and other HCV-related proteins.

107. (Currently amended) The composition of Claim [65]106 wherein said recombinant HCV capsid antigen consists of amino acids 1-120 of SEQ ID NO:8.

108. (Currently amended) The composition of Claim [65]106 wherein said recombinant HCV nonstructural 794 antigen consists of amino acids of SEQ ID NO:16.

109. (Currently amended) The composition of Claim [66]107 wherein said recombinant HCV nonstructural 794 antigen consists of amino acids of SEQ ID NO:16.

110. (Currently amended) The composition of Claim [65]106, wherein the ratio by

weight of said capsid antigen to said nonstructural antigen is in a range of about 8:1 to about 1:1.

111. (Currently amended) The composition of Claim ~~68~~109, wherein the ratio by weight of said capsid antigen to said nonstructural antigen is in a range of about 8:1 to about 1:1.

112. (Currently amended) A diagnostic system, in kit form, comprising, in an amount sufficient to perform an assay, the composition of any one of claims ~~65, 68, 69 or~~
70106, 109, 110 or 111.

113. (Currently amended) A method of assaying a body fluid sample for the presence of antibodies against an HCV capsid antigen or an HCV nonstructural antigen, which method comprises:

- a) forming an immunoreaction admixture by admixing said body fluid sample with a composition of any one of claims ~~65, 68, 69 or~~70106, 109, 110 or 111;
- b) maintaining said immunoreaction admixture for a time period sufficient for any of said antibodies present to immunoreact with one or more of said antigens to form an immunoreaction product; and
- c) detecting the presence of any of said immunoreaction product formed and thereby the presence of said antibodies.

114. (Currently amended) The method of Claim [74]113, wherein said specific binding agent is Protein A, or at least one of the antibodies anti-human IgG and anti-human IgM.

115. (Currently amended) The method of Claim [74]113, wherein said label is lanthanide chelate, biotin, an enzyme, a radioactive isotope or a fluorescent moiety.